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ABSTRACT

Studies of beginning reading sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education indicate that teachers, not methods, account for the major differences in the results of instruction and that reading instruction can be improved via combinations of methods. Consequently, teachers should be free to select materials and methods most appropriate for children for whom they are responsible. In planning instruction so that the child's reading development phases with his over-all development, the teacher should keep several basic considerations in mind: (1) Development and maintenance of a positive self-image are vital to the child's academic growth as well as to his personality development. (2) Children differ in their preferred sensory modes of learning. (3) Programmed materials do not provide opportunities for a child to question, share ideas, react to situations, or test ideas on others. (4) Some research indicates that differences in interest patterns are more important to reading development than those of age, sex, intelligence, or reading achievement. Providing properly for that difference involves both presenting materials which match the child's interests and those capable of broadening and advancing them. (Author/RD)

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Phasing Reading Development with Child Development: A Plea

Child Development and Reading (Primary Grades)

"The merit of originality is not
novelty, it is sincerity." Carlyle

The author of this article has made no claim of originality, for all he has said, has been said many times before. Like good books, however, there are some things which bear repeating. He has sincerely attempted to call attention to the two most important factors in teaching children to read - the child and the teacher!

CS 000 025

Teacher - Key to Success

The U. S. Commissioner of Education, James E. Allen, Jr. (1) has issued the challenge to eliminate the serious reading difficulties experienced by one out of every four students and to obtain universal literacy throughout the nation by the end of the 1970's. It has become

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increasingly apparent that the schools of the seventies will be held accountable for performance. In the sixties teachers found that they could be heard. They placed demands upon society to better their lot, and rightly so. Now in the seventies society is demanding results. If there is doubt of this demand we have, as Lee (11) has suggested, only to read a current magazine. Edinger and Sands (6) have pointed out that " . . . the old era of blind, unquestionable faith in schools is over." The time will soon end when parents can be satisfied by a teacher explaining what is being done with a whole class instead of telling specifically how each child is being helped. This demand for performance will not be limited to parents, nor will it be only on the elementary and secondary level. It will also be felt on the college campus. Students are beginning to demand more than "canned" lectures by professors who have not changed their notes or even their jokes in ten years or more. This is not to imply that our schools have failed. In face as Gates (8) and Cremin (4) have reported there is mounting evidence to the contrary. Children are reading better today than their predecessors of twenty-five years ago. Progress has been made with some children, but the fact remains that in spite of the fine efforts, there are too many children who are not being reached.

Any discussion of improving reading instruction involves the question of which method or approach works best. The debate over the "best method" has been with us for a long time and apparently it will remain with us. There is no denying that results do differ with various methods, but there

has yet to be found the one method that teaches all children equally well. In scanning the leterature, listening to experts in the field, and observing practices in the classroom it has seemed that we are obsessed with the idea of finding such a method. To paraphrase a well known saying, we do not seem to be able to see the trees for the forest. In our efforts to reach all children with a single approach we have tended to lose sight of the individual and the need for the teacher to adapt instruction to the specific needs of each child. We have long talked about individual differences, but in actual practice we have been reluctant to accept these differences in the classroom. We have tried to group children so differences would not exist and have searched for a method that would encompass all the differences. Such practices, according to Gans (7), have led to a belief that one set of materials and specified methods will teach all children to read. This has resulted in teachers being less inclined to meet individual differences, over-dependence on how-to-do instructions, lack of creative teaching, less time for personally selected reading, limited sharing of stories and class discussion, and more commercially prepared work. This should not be the case. The results from the beginning reading studies sponsored by the U. S. Office of Education indicates that teachers, not methods, account for the major differences in the results of the studies, and that reading instruction can be improved by combining methods.

For too long we have been program oriented, thinking that what is good for one child must be good for all. We speak of being a profession, but act

as though teachers are not capable of making important decisions of what is "best" for children! It is time we started letting teachers select the materials and methods that work best with the children for whom they are responsible. Along with the emphasis on the "right-to-read" we need an emphasis on the "right-to-teach."

Basic Considerations

No attempt has been made to cover all aspects of child development as it relates to the teaching of reading. The following, however, would seem to be necessary considerations if teachers are to phase reading instruction with the child's over all development.

Total Child Growth. Reading is an intergal part of total child growth. It is both dependent upon growth in other areas and it affects other growth areas. The literature abounds with studies which show the relationship between physical, mental, emotional, and social maturity and performance in reading. As teachers, do we also consider that reading performance affects other areas of development? We must keep in mind that developing a positive self-image is one of the most important parts of early learning. As Earl C. Kelly has said,

> "Physical death is not the only form of death or of being diminished. When anybody is made to think less of himself, to feel less able, it is partial death; and if it continues, the individual can become dead in the sense that he has become ineffective, immobilized, unable to enhance himself or others." *

We must be sure the manner in which we teach reading does not cause children to feel defeated and unsure of themselves. It is the wise teacher that will not allow a child who, because of immaturity or other learning problems, is not ready for independent effort to be placed in a situation where he will become discouraged.

Each Child Unique. An examination of child development calls attention to the uniqueness of the individual and the importance of providing an environment which allows children to grow and mature at their own rate of development. Children are unique in many ways, but in this paper only some of the less commonly thought of ways in which children differ have been discussed. Any discussion of individual differences would be incomplete without considering reading readiness. MacGinitie (12) explains the concept of readiness by asking the question, "The child is in school to learn - what and how is he ready to learn? This question places readiness in proper perspective. It is not an all-or-none situation. Readiness encompasses the whole idea of phasing reading development with child development. It depends on the method and materials that are used and on the level at which instruction begins.

Dechant (5) has pointed out that to really know a child a teacher must be aware of the pupil's preferred mode of learning. Children differ in visual, auditory, and motor imagery. Some children learn more easily through an auditory approach: while others prefer a visual approach: and still others rely upon a kinesthetic approach. Realizing that children do

differ in their sensory approaches to learning, the teacher has the responsibility of identifying the child's preferred mode of learning before selecting a method to use with him.

In keeping with the idea of how the child learns, much has been said about children discovering new ideas or new relationships for themselves. Almy (2) has suggested that this is the essence of Piaget's theory. New ideas are acquired by the child by trying them out within the context of his previous learning. To accomplish this a child needs opportunities to question, to share ideas, to react to situations, and to test or try out his ideas on others. In selecting materials it should be kept in mind that programmed materials do not provide these types of experiences. This is not to imply that programmed materials are not of value in the teaching of reading. A better balance, however, is needed in the types of activities engaged in during the school day. Too much of the day in too many schools is spent by students "quietly working at their desk." What makes this really sad is that it is often thought of as individualizing instruction.

Children differ in many ways, but Harris (9) suggests that individual differences in interest patterns are more important than age differences, sex differences, differences in intelligence, or differences in reading achievement. The importance of interest can best be illustrated by the example of a fifth grade boy named Ricky. He was showing little progress in reading despite the combined efforts of several specialists and much

individual help in the classroom. One day Ricky told his teacher he would like to be a Boy Scout and asked if the teacher would help him. Using the Boy Scout Manual, Ricky made more progress in reading than had ever been imagined possible by those working with him. If, however, we are to develop life long readers we must do more than just provide materials which match the child's interests. Our major concern should be to help children develop broader and more advanced reading tastes. This goal can more readily be accomplished by providing children with a wide variety of reading experiences. As Althea Berry has said,

> "We should reappraise any program that suggests that children should spend more time in talking or studying about reading than in reading."

The nation will be watching during the seventies! The challenge is before us to see that all children are provided the "right to read". If we fail to adapt instruction to the developmental needs of children then we will have to live with the terrible thought expressed by the judge in Maud Muller when he said,

> "For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these; IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN!"

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* Althea Berry, "And Gladly Read" Children and Literature, ed. Jane H. Catterson, Newark: International Reading Association, 1970, P. 2.

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